

## [Nina Boone]

Spencer Mill Village

Spindale, N. C.

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I. L. M.

NINA BOONE

They live right on the rim of Happy Hollow. Their small three-room house looks out over a strip of woods in which are located all hogpens belonging to residents of Happy Hollow. Happy Hollow is that part of the Spencer Mill Village which rambles gradually over three streets, down into a valley-space covered by green, shade-giving trees. The day in late September when I went to see Nina Boone, I went past the little valley, followed the up-grade, dusty road around a bend and stopped in front of Nina's house.

The front of the house perched up on tall, skinny, brick pillars which gave its rear end the appearance of having been dumped on the ground. Up under the front of the house Nina has stored an old trunk and a broken-down chair. Nina has no room inside for storing any article not in use. She tries as best she may to provide living-space for her six children, herself, and husband.

I heard the heavy tread of an old sewing machine come to an abrupt halt as I walked up on the porch. Tiny feet scurried over the rough floor, and when Nina came to the door three of her small children were at her heels.

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"Come on in if you can push you way through this crowd of little ones," she said and smiled. I thought as I looked at her how [queer?] it was for a middle-aged women to have so many children who were still babies. For everything about her face led me to believe she must be more then forty-five. Her light brown hair was drawn smoothly back from her wrinkled forehead, and her face tapered off into an [emaciated?] chin. Two decayed front teeth added age to Nina's smile, but could not dim its expression of humor, patience, and fortitude.

After offering me a chair, Nina had sat down and taken in her lap her two-year-old baby. The other two small ones stood close to her chair. The three next in age stood around the hearth, and over in the third chair in the room sat [Nora?], the oldest child.

"Why, they are all girls," I observed presently.

"Yes, six girls, and the little one that died was a girl too," Nina said.

"You'll have your hands full rearing six children," I said, thinking what a fortunate thing for Nina that her child-bearing had started comparatively late and that it was now over.

"I was a tryin' to make Nora a little print to wear to school," Nina said. "The child don't have no clothes 3 atall."

"What grade are you in, Nora?" I asked.

"Seventh," Nora replied.

"She's always done well in school," Nina said. "She's not quite thirteen yet. She come along exactly one year after me and Jim was married. She was born on my nineteenth birthday."

Even after I had added nineteen and thirteen at least three times it was hard for me to believe that Nina was only thirty-two. Seven children in thirteen years and she was only

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thirty-two. I was wondering if the Boone family was yet complete when Nina said, "My Ma had thirteen children."

The children were very quiet in the room as they stood and looked at me. Some of them had bright red hair and the others had brown hair like their mother. All of them had bright blue eyes. They wore patched clothes, all of them, but they were dirty only with that day's dirt. Their patched clothes had been clean when the day began. The four-year old had a rust-colored patch shaped like a hatchet on her faded yellow print. It spread ludicrously across her little stomach as she stood with her hands behind her back and looked at me out of solemn, beautiful eyes.

The children looked first at Nina and then at me as Nina told me a few things about her life.

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Nina was born in [Polk?] County on her father's small mountain farm. She went as far as the sixth grade in the country school near her home. There was always work to do and plenty of field work too. On two Sundays a month she went with her family to the community church and other than that there was very little diversion in her life. It was at church that she met Jim when she was sixteen and he was eighteen. Jim who had spent all of his life at a cotton mill was visiting his uncle near Nina's home. When she was eighteen and Jim was twenty they married and Nina moved with Jim to the mill. Eleven years ago they moved to Spencer mill. For the past eight years they have lived in the little house on the rim of Happy Hollow.

"But it don't seem like we can live here much longer," Nina said. "When the children start growin' up they won't be room enough for all of 'em in one room. Jim's spoke for another house when one gets empty. There's only one reason why I'd hate to leave down here. It's such good grazin' for my cow, and without a cow we couldn't feed the children. We've kept a cow all along and it's been a blessin'. The garden and the cow kept us goin' this

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past summer when the mill was shut down for five weeks. We never got 5 behind with anything but the insurance. He got \$7.54 unemployment money during that time and we never could understand why he didn't get more. He went in to Rutherfordton every week for awhile but he never got but that one check.

"I went to Pa's this summer and canned all I could. That helps out a lot when wages is low. It's still over there but we hope to go after it tomorrow if he can borrow his brother's car. Once winter sets in we ain't likely to get over there. Then, they may be somethin' else on the place that will do to can if we get it before the frost damages it."

Nina stopped talking, and the children, restless after standing so still began to whisper among themselves. The four-year-old skipped across the room and leaned against her sister's chair. "I wish I had a dress like yourn," she said to Nora.

"Maybe Mama can make you one out of the scraps," Nora said and smiled at the child.

"Are you gonna wear it to school tomorrow?" the child asked.

"She'll want to save it to wear to Sunday School first," Nina said. "She don't never miss a Sunday," she continued, turning to me. "She says she wants to be a church worker if she can get enough education.

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Like bein' a home missionary," she explained.

With attention focused on her, Nora's transparent skin turned rosy pink. She played confusedly with the fingers of the four-year-old. Presently she had overcome her embarrassment enough to say, "We've got a awful pretty church."

I told her that I had seen the / church that morning while walking over the mill village and I had observed particularly the pretty shrubbery around it.

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"I think it's prettier inside than outside," she said.

All the children except Nora and the baby ran out on the small porch and left a felling of emptiness in the bare-looking room. There were the three chairs, the old machine, a rickety table, and a bed.

"Sometimes I've wished it was so I could get a job, and Jim says he wouldn't want me to leave the children if I could," Nina said. "He don't think nobody would take the same care of 'em that I do. But it's all we can do to live on \$13 a week. Sometimes he don't make that much. He says when they get older and more of 'em start to school he don't see how he can manage unless wages go up.

"Jim thinks if any man can get better wages for 7 the poor man Roosevelt can. He says they ain't much Roosevelt can do by hisself though. But you don't know how much good it does Jim to feel that somebody is tryin' to help us even if he don't get nothin' done. He's said to me more than once, 'Nina, that's a man with a heart big enough to want to help us that's never had much of a chance.'

"Jim wants all the children to go through high school but I don't know whether we can keep 'em in school that long or not."

"It is a problem to send six children through school," I said.

An embarrassed expression passed quickly across Nina's face. At that moment the baby wiggled down from her lap and ran out on the porch to join the other children. It was then for the first time that I saw Nina was with child.